Children's Charter

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A CHILDREN'S CHARTER

This pamphlet was prepared by the Standing Joint Committee of Industrial Women's Organisations—which is the Labour Party's Advisory Committee on Women's Questions—as a Report to the National Conference of Labour Women, Norwich, 1937, and was endorsed by that Conference.

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THE STATE AND THE CHILD

The purpose of this pamphlet is to indicate the social provision which the community should make for its children.

It was in the past taken for granted that the care and wellbeing of the child was the responsibility solely of its parents. Every new demand upon the state or local authorities on behalf of children was described in some quarters as further evidence of a " weakening of parental responsibility." Actually the reverse was true. Labour women who have consistently asked for wider social provision for the needs of childhood, have done so out of a growing sense of responsibility, both as mothers and citizens, derived from their Socialist conception of human personality. They reject the view that a child is the " property " of its parents, an investment for their own future; they regard every child as an individual, and potential citizen, with a personality to be respected, and the right to the conditions which will ensure its healthy development—physical, mental, emotional.

Everyone is agreed that the mother has a special responsibility for the wellbeing of her child, and that the child has a right to the security which a happy home provides. But many of the needs of children can better be met collectively by the community than by the individual home—and this would still be true even if the burden of extreme poverty were lifted from the thousands of homes overshadowed by this burden to-day. For the view is based on a surer knowledge than our fathers and mothers had of the physical and mental needs of the child, and of the laws of its growth.

CHILDREN'S ALLOWANCES

As Socialists we believe that every child has a right to a share in the nation's resources, and that, in a Socialist state, with these resources co-operatively owned and controlled, we should meet this claim by an adequate provision of social services along with a system of allowances paid to mothers in respect of their children.

But we do not regard a complete system of children's allowances as immediately practicable in present circumstances.

With wage-standards in some industries disastrously low, and the bargaining power of some sections of workers weakened through economic depression and prolonged unemployment, the introduction of a system of family allowances covering all children to the end of school life, would react harmfully on wage levels. There would be an inevitabe tendency to level out the difference between the wage-rates of men and women workers, not by raising the women's standard, but by driving all adult wages down to that standard, and in the end there would be no increase in the standard of life.

The second reason is that a complete system of family allowances would be exceedingly costly, and in present circumstances would jeopardise other urgent extensions in social services—health, housing, pensions, education, nursery schools, open-air schools, school meals, a pure milk supply. All these are factors in the social environment on which the welfare of our children depends in very large measure.

The greatest good to the children and to the community would be secured by concentrating in the first place on an extension of these and other social services, with a partial system of children's allowances, first to cover the extra years at school when the school age is raised.

Consideration should also be given to the most appropriate next step, to be carried out when practicable. We suggest that this might be the provision of cash allowances to cover the first year, or two years, of the child's life.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Whatever provision we make now or later of cash allowances to mothers to enable them to carry out their responsibilities towards their children free from anxiety, the community must still provide collectively for many of the needs of childhood, and our problem is how to

plan to make the best use on behalf of the children, of the resources available now and during the period of transition to a Socialist society.

What are the main responsibilities of an enlightened community towards its children?

We should recognise it as a social duty to secure for every child, first of all, equal oppoortunities for healthy physical growth; and second, equal opportunities for the free development of personality and individual capacity. In other words, we owe it to the nation's children to abolish class distinction in health and class distinction in education.

CARE OF INFANCY

The Handicap of Poverty

Class distinction in health is a phrase that sounds harsh to the ears of those who prefer to attribute the results of poverty to any cause but poverty. The figures of infant mortality give the answer. While the infant death rate has shown, for the country as a whole, a remarkable decline over a period of years, the contrast between figures for the poor area and the comparatively prosperous area, or the overcrowded ward and the residential ward in the same borough make it clear that poverty is a handicap to a child from the moment of its birth; that three or four times as many babies die in the first year of life in the poor areas as in the well-to-do; that poverty-stricken districts with a comparatively low infant death rate, are districts where the community, through the Local Authority, has provided housing conditions and medical and other social services which have meant a definite improvement in the standard of life in the homes, and so have given the babies a fairer start.

Pre-Natal Care

How can we develop and extend our social services to improve the nurture of our children in the early period of life?

The Maternity and Child Welfare Act gives very wide powers to local authorities for the supervision of expectant and nursing mothers and children up to five. The powers are insufficiently used in many areas.

A child's future is determined before it is born, and to lay the foundations of healthy childhood, we must begin with the expectant mother. We must urge the Authorities to increase the provision of ante-natal clinics to ensure adequate medical supervision throughout pregnancy, and to make use of the Midwives Act to ensure nursing care for mothers at and after childbirth. These measures are in the interests of the child as well as the mother.

Child Welfare Centres

The provision of child welfare centres is generally more satisfactory than of ante-natal clinics, but in very few areas is there any attempt to supervise the health of all children up to five. It is taken for granted that mothers should bring their babies to the centre only until they are twelve months, or at most, two years old. There is a 'gap' between two and five in the health supervision of children, but if the Maternity and Child Welfare Act were carried out fully, there would be no gap.

It is true that mothers would in many cases be unwilling to continue coming to the child welfare centre after the baby is a year or two years old, especially the young mother who has other children.

Care of the Toddler

But the general failure to supervise the health of children after the first year is not mainly due to the mothers, but to the fact that the child welfare service is almost everywhere organised to deal only with early infancy and no attempt is made to provide clinics and staff sufficient to cope with older children and with the toddlers nor to educate the public in the need for continuous supervision up to school age.

Further, there has been a tendency, strengthened during years of widespread poverty and unemployment,

to look upon the Child Welfare Service only as a method of helping poor mothers. It is, of course, important that the welfare centres should be used as fully and freely as possible by poor mothers, but it is equally important to emphasise that they provide a service which **all** children need and which can better be met collectively than by parents individually.

We cannot reap the full fruits of the increased care which is being provided through the centres for children during their first year, unless we ensure that this care continues until the child passes to the supervision of the School Medical Service.

Development of Child Welfare Services

Local Authorities should be required to organise a system of child welfare centres and health visitors adequate to ensure health supervision for all children up to two, and also of children between two and five, who cannot immediately be included in Nursery Schools or Nursery Classes. The importance of such provision cannot be over-estimated, and the value of the Toddlers' Clinic has been proved, for example, in Woolwich and other boroughs, which have been alive to the need for closing the gap which exists between two and five.

In boroughs and closely populated urban districts separate toddlers' clinics should be established—attached to the existing child welfare centres. While providing facilities for the treatment of all defects, they should be regarded primarily as centres for supervising health and preventing defects, not as centres to which children are brought only after some defect has become apparent.

Day Nurseries

Local Authorities can provide Day Nurseries where mothers who are at work may bring their children to be looked after. This power should be used more fully. Day Nurseries should be organised as far as possible to meet the needs of the mothers and children, and while they should take any children below school age, it is preferable to have Nursery Schools for children after the age of two.

Good Nutrition

The supreme need of the child before birth and in the first years of life is good nutrition, and the most important factor in good nutrition is good food. It should be the duty of the community to ensure that the expectant mother, the nursing mother and the infant have an adequate supply of the right food. If the mother is not properly fed during pregnancy, her baby's health will suffer, if not at birth, by the time it is a few months old.

The Maternity and Child Welfare Act gives power to the Local Authority to provide food, free or at cheap rates, to "necessitous" mothers and young children, but figures show how inadequately this power is used. In 1935 seven million gallons of milk were distributed free, or at cheap rates, through Maternity and Child Welfare Authorities in England and Wales. This means a daily average of only 150,000 pints of free or cheap milk to expectant or nursing mothers and children up to five.

Maternity and Child Welfare Committees should be asked to use the power to provide food much more generously and so long as the free provision of food is limited to "necessitous" mothers and children, they should be urged to place the income limit as high as possible. The provision of dinners to mothers should be encouraged, especially in areas where poverty is severe. A number of Local Health Authorities make such provision at present with very good results.

Importance of Milk

For the expectant mother, the nursing mother and the young child, milk is an all important food. Sir George Newman has said that the expectant mother should have two pints of milk per day, and all authorities suggest a pint per day as the minimum for young children and a higher minimum for older children. In homes dependent on unemployment benefit or on very low wages it is clearly impossible at present for mothers or young children to obtain anything like the quantity of milk the experts say they need. The Household Budgets enquiry which we carried out last year showed that in 37 per cent.

of the unemployed homes no fresh milk was bought. In many of these homes there was an expectant mother and in a large number of them there were young children.

But in many homes well above the unemployment benefit standard, and well above the income limit recognised for free milk by the most generous Local Authorities, it is impossible to buy sufficient milk for the needs of mothers and children.

Milk for Mothers and Young Children

Steps should be taken to plan a national scheme which would guarantee to all expectant and nursing mothers and children below school age an adequate daily supply of milk. It might be arranged that every mother attending an ante-natal or child welfare centre would automatically receive an order for milk for herself or her child to be renewed through the Welfare Centre at regular intervals: and that mothers outside the scope of any child welfare centre should be granted an order for milk on intimation being sent to the Medical Officer for the area either by her doctor or by a Health Visitor.

The milk orders could be made on any retailer approved by the Health Committee.

While it seems desirable to aim at a scheme which would provide milk free for all mothers and infants, if a completely free scheme were impracticable at first, we suggest that the milk be free to those below an income limit (to be fixed reasonably high) and supplied at 1d. or 1½d. per pint to those above the limit.

We would urge the Party to give attention to planning a scheme on the lines suggested which would secure a daily ration of milk to mothers and young children. This, together with adequate medical supervision, would lay the foundations of a healthier nation.

EDUCATION

Education and Environment

The foregoing measures are designed to ensure health throughout infancy. When we turn to education, we are not passing to a separate question. Education is not

merely a matter of the hours spent in school, but of the whole social environment by which physical, mental and emotional development is influenced. Good food and good housing conditions are perhaps the most urgent **educational** reforms. Our educational institutions are too often forced into a struggle with social conditions which defeat the purpose of education.

But education methods and institutions must be improved and reorganised in order to achieve equal opportunities for all children.

Three Stages in Education

Education should be regarded as a continuous process in stages corresponding to the three stages in the development of the normal child.

1. Nursery School—two to seven years.
2. Primary School—seven to eleven.
3. Secondary School—eleven to sixteen.

The Nursery School

The Nursery School should not be regarded as a mere adjunct—nor even a "desirable adjunct" (to quote the words of the Consultative Committee to the Board of Education)—to our educational system. It should be an integral part of that system; the essential foundation for further stages of education.

The number of Nursery Schools in England and Wales is only 84—with accommodation for 6,350 children.

Educational Arguments

Nursery Schools should be available for all children, irrespective of home conditions. The most important argument for bringing the child to the Nursery School at two years of age is the child himself: his awakening faculties and developing senses. At this age his world is beginning to take shape and colour, and discoveries are made; he is beginning to learn through his senses. The nursery school provides an environment more suited to his needs than the home—even the fairly well-to-do home.

For in the home, life is organised mainly for adults; furniture and equipment are measured to adult needs; the child's natural instinct to look at things, to touch and handle things must be repressed. Because almost everything in his home is designed for adults, grown-ups are constantly doing things for him which he could very well do for himself—serving his dinner, or putting his toys away in the cupboard. At home he cannot enjoy the society of his own contemporaries—and we are beginning to understand that the two-year and three-year-olds need the companionship of others of their own age as well as the affection of parents and the companionship of older brothers and sisters.

But the Nursery School is in no sense a rival to the home—it is an extension of the home, and provision is made for the association of parents in the life of the Nursery School.

Social Considerations

The purely educational argument for the Nursery School is reinforced by other considerations. Between a quarter and a third of the child admitted to the infant schools at 5 are already damaged in health. Most of the defects, some slight, some serious are preventable, and as figures show, can be prevented by the Nursery School.

Bad social conditions further strengthen our case. The following quotation from the memorandum which was endorsed by the National Conference of Labour Women in 1933 is as true to-day as it was four years ago:—

> "In overcrowded industrial districts and slum areas, the need for Nursery Schools is most urgent. In the homes in such districts it is impossible often for children to know quietness or to enjoy refreshing sleep; there is no bath and no hot water supply; and if, as is likely, the father is receiving low wages or is unemployed, suitable clothing and adequate nourishment are lacking as well. . . . .
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> In such districts, too, the street is frequently the only playground and every year with the increase of traffic it becomes a more dangerous playground. From London, Durham, Manchester, and other district, we have received information about the growing dangers of street traffic for young children, and the lack of alternative playgrounds. . . . .

The prolonged industrial depression gives an additional reason why Nursery Schools should be provided for young children. Most mothers strive heroically to save their children from knowledge of the terrible struggle and worry which prolonged unemployment brings, but the atmosphere of anxiety and hopelessness which hangs over thousands of homes in the depressed areas to-day is bound to communicate itself to the young children and to influence their outlook. One mother has written us as follows: 'In the Rhondda the children need to be rescued from the atmosphere of depression and apathy caused by low wages and unemployment. There is now growing up here a generation of children who have never seen their fathers work.'"

Board of Education Attitude

During the period of the Labour Government direct encouragement was given to Education Authorities to build Nursery Schools, but the National Government in 1931 reversed the process and a number of schemes were postponed.

Local Authorities were asked rather half-heartedly in January, 1936 (Circular 1444) to consider the question of Nursery Schools, but in this circular the view is expressed—and is repeated in the pamphlet on Nursery Schools and Classes published a little later by the Board of Education—that the Nursery School is primarily a palliative for bad home conditions, a place for those children whose mothers are at work outside the home, or a remedial centre for children already debilitated.

This attitude is deplorable—and so, too, is the tendency of the Board to encourage the second-rate makeshift apparatus, and the Nursery Class in preference to the Nursery School.

While the Nursery Class in some districts may be the only practicable alternative to no provision at all for children under five, the policy of the Board should be the Open-air Nursery School. Where it is necessary to adopt the Nursery Class, the usual Nursery School equipment and staffing should be insisted upon.

Future Developments

While we think it desirable that all children, irrespective of home conditions, should attend Nursery Schools, we do not suggest that attendance should at present be made compulsory.

We propose, however, that the Minister of Education should (a) request every Education Authority to establish at least one Nursery School in its area within a given period; (b) require Education Authorities to provide Nursery Schools wherever there is a request from at least 40 or 50 parents of children betwen 2 and 5; and (c) insist that in overcrowded urban areas and in depressed areas adequate Nursery School accommodation is provided speedily for all young children.

Existing Nursery Schools, with few exceptions, take children from 2 to 5, but there is a great deal to be said for raising the age to 7. New Nursery Schools should provide for children from 2 to 7, and existing infant departments and classes should be reorganised on Nursery School lines. It is undesirable that there should be a break, or a transition to the infant school, at the age of 5, for those children who come to the Nursery School at 2. The point was clearly put in the pamphlet "From Nursery School to University," published some years ago by the Labour Party and Trades Union Congress: "From the physiological standpoint the first seven years of life make one epoch, and the conditions of a good Nursery School are those best adapted to this age."

Nursery School buildings should be simply constructed, open to air and sun, and surrounded by spacious garden playground. They should have hot water supply and bathing facilities, and suitable equipment for play and "lessons."

The provision of meals should be part of the routine of every Nursery School.

THE PRIMARY SCHOOL

The children will pass at seven, from the Nursery School or the Infant School to the Primary School, and we must see that our schools are fit to receive them.

School Buildings

Many existing schools provide a totally unsuitable environment for children: antiquated, unhealthy, badly ventilated and badly heated, deficient in cloakroom and washing accommodation, with no facilities for meals, and surrounded by old playgrounds which collect pools of water on every rainy day.

In May, 1936, the President of the Board of Education stated that there were 1,076 defective schools. The term "defective school" is a choice example of official understatement, for many of the defective schools are qualified for the "black list," a word which, under the stress of reaction, has disappeared from the official vocabulary. There are still classes with more than 50 pupils, and a very large number with over 40. These conditions are injurious to the children and unfair to the teachers.

The Board of Education should fix a date by which all unsuitable buildings are replaced, and all defective buildings re-modelled.

New school buildings should conform to modern standards: they should be built to admit sun and fresh air. We should also increase the number of open-air schools.

All schools should have ample facilities for practical and physical instruction, and, wherever possible, should have a school garden as well as a playground attached. Every new school should have a dining room, or a hall suitable for the purpose of meals, as well as proper facilities for cooking meals.

Playing fields should be provided by every Authority for primary as well as secondary schools.

The holding of classes in parks, or out-of-doors during fine weather should be encouraged.

Size of Classes

A date should be fixed by which all classes must be reduced to forty with a view to a further reduction to thirty at the earliest possible moment.

Defective and Ailing Children

The needs of children who are unable to attend the ordinary primary school should have special consideration, but it is certain that with a widespread provision of nursery schools, there will be fewer children at the primary stage unable to take part in the work of the school because of defects—physical or mental.

Every Education Authority should, however, make suitable provision—where necessary jointly with other Authorities, and by means of residential schools in sparsely populated areas—for the education of blind, myopic, and deaf children. Special classes for backward children, and special schools for mentally defective children should also be available.

In addition to special schools for children with physical defects, open-air schools and convalescent homes should also be provided for children who are ailing or recovering from illness.

Playgrounds for Children

The only playground accessible after school hours to large numbers of children is the street. The street is an unsuitable playground, and every year it becomes a more dangerous one. Local authorities should be required to make provision for children's playgrounds, in addition to school playgrounds, and on new housing estates sites should be reserved for this purpose, as well as for Nursery Schools.

THE SECONDARY SCHOOL

Primary school education should normally end at 11, when the children should pass to the secondary school. Drastic changes are urgent in our system of post-primary education. We agree with the words of the Hadow Report (published in 1927) that "all normal children should begin some form of secondary education about the age of 11." Had the reorganisation suggested in that Report been carried out, a system of secondary education for all would have been by now in existence.

Government Policy

But educational advance has had a severe setback in recent years. The Government refused after 1931 to sanction the expenditure necessary for complete reorganisation; it abolished free secondary education, raised fees and restricted free places in secondary schools. The Education Act of 1936 purported to raise the school age to 15, but will permit exemptions for "beneficial employment," reflecting the familiar Tory view that the needs of industry and not the welfare of children should determine the length and quality of education provided for the mass of working-class children.

Raise the School Age

Secondary education is the right of every child. While secondary education is regarded as the right of the well-to-do, for the working-class it is considered a special privilege, open only to a few, and is denied to the large majority of children.

A longer school period is necessary in order to plan a proper system of secondary education for all children and to ensure that they derive the fullest benefit from it.

The school age should therefore be raised immediately to 15, and a date fixed after which children must remain in school till 16. Maintenance grants should be provided to parents for the extra school period.

Abolish Fees

Fees in secondary schools should be abolished and secondary education should be free to all children.

A Unified System

All post-primary schools should be unified in one single system and administered under the same code of regulations.

Central and Senior Schools which at present come under the elementary regulations, and Technical and other schools which are under the regulations for further education, should be brought under the same code of

secondary school regulations, and the standards prescribed for secondary schools should be required for all schools.

Equal standards should be laid down not only in regard to staffing and equipment, but in regard to accommodation, structure, playing fields, etc.

The secondary school should include various types of courses to suit the various aptitudes and capacities of children. These courses should be of equal status, and the capacity of the child and not the income of his parents, should determine the type of course which the child enters at the age of 11. But there should, of course, be sufficient elasticity to enable a child to pass from one type of course to another if his inclinations alter after a year or two.

The view of the Hadow Committee that "a liberal education is not one given through books alone but one which brings children into contact with the larger interests of mankind" is one with which we agree. Secondary education should be general education and not vocational in the narrow sense. If we are to relate education "to the larger interests of mankind", the necessity of earning a living cannot be ignored, but the secondary school is not the place to train children for particular occupations.

The secondary school should aim, therefore, at the development of general capacity and intelligence and at fitting boys and girls for citizenship and for their leisure in after life, rather than for a particular job.

EMPLOYMENT OF SCHOOL CHILDREN

The law permits the employment of school children at twelve years of age out of school hours. Such employment is definitely injurious to the interests of the children. The child who comes to school in the morning after having spent an hour or two delivering milk or newspapers, probably insufficiently clad for cold or wet weather, is not in a state to give his best to or receive the best from the day's work in school. He is likely to

suffer from lack of sleep in view of the early hour at which he must start his job. The reason for taking the job is, in almost every case, economic pressure in the home, so that the children who regularly do an hour or two of paid work in addition to their school work, are likely to lack nourishing food and therefore are least able to stand the additional strain.

It cannot be said too emphatically that children of school age should not have to bear the burden of poverty in the home, and legislation should be passed immediately to prohibit the employment of children out of school hours up to the school-leaving age.

NUTRITION OF SCHOOL CHILDREN

School Meals for All

A mid-day meal at school should be part of a complete system of free education. This proposal is justified on educational grounds, though it appears to give rise to fears about the break up of home life.

But in many secondary schools to-day a mid-day meal is provided for those who care to take it, and there is no evidence of any disturbance of family unity as a consequence. It is difficult to see how home life or family unity is preserved by a small boy rushing home from school at lunch hour, bolting much too quickly the meal his mother has prepared, unwilling even to sit down at table because of his anxiety to be back in the school playground for 15 minutes' play before the afternoon bell rings!

A normal healthy child is not very conscious of family affection between half-past nine in the morning and four in the afternoon. During that period his world, naturally and properly, is the school. His education is not just a question of a teacher, books, and blackboard, and his relation to them; it is essentially a social experience in which his class mates play an important part. It is desirable that the school period every day should be continuous and unbroken, and that the children should have their mid-day meal together as part of the day's routine.

If any parents have strong objections, the school meal need not be compulsory, but we believe that once it is an established part of the life of the school, the children themselves will settle that point.

There is a strong argument for school meals on educational grounds, even if every child could have a dinner at home. But there are thousands of children to-day whose mothers, spending their incomes with the utmost wisdom, cannot possibly provide a good dinner at home. The only way to ensure that these children are fed is to make school meals available for all. No method of providing free meals on the basis of an income test—and this is required by existing legislation—can ensure that those who lack food at home have meals at school, for children, as well as parents, are reluctant to admit poverty, and often prefer to go without the meals which are to-day a sign of their poverty.

Immediate Measures

School meals for all is therefore a sound policy, and experience in areas where school meals are at present supplied shows that the cost is comparatively small. But a Labour Government faced with the need for legislating over a very wide field to eliminate bad social conditions and to assist the victims of the present economic order, would find it difficult to introduce at one step a universal system of free school meals.

We should, however, take steps in that direction, with a view to improving as speedily as possible the nutrition and health of school children.

Two facts will determine our immediate demands: (1) the importance of safeguarding health in early years, and (2) the prevalence of underfeeding.

Health of Toddlers

It is estimated that three-quarters of the 7,000 deaths which occur annually in the age group two to five could be prevented. Many of them are due to conditions associated with poverty. Nursery Schools, by providing

suitable conditions for growth and nurture, would undoubtedly save the health and the lives of many of these children. The conditions which kill some children impair the health of many more, and of the children who enter school to-day at five years old, one-third or more are found to suffer from defects (other than dental defects) many of them requiring treatment. These defects are frequently the direct result of inadequate diet.

Nutrition of School Children

Facts and figures published annually by the Board of Education inspire the comforting conclusion that all is well with the nutrition of school children. But reports from many areas, both rural and industrial, tell a different story, and a close study of these reports underlines the fact which we have referred to elsewhere (see pamphlet: "Nutrition and Food Supplies"), that generalisations about nutrition based on averaging a mass of information compiled on different standards from district to district are often very misleading.

What is "Normal Nutrition"?

School Medical Officers are required to classify children for nutrition under four heads—Excellent, Normal, Sub-Normal and Bad. The figures they produce depend on the interpretation of the word "Normal." When Medical Officers take the height of school children they use a common measuring rod—an inch is the same in London as it is in Glamorgan. In assessing nutrition there is no common standard and it is clear that Medical Officers have widely differing views about "normal" nutrition. Some doctors probably have in mind some sort of ideal standard—the level of health of children who are really well fed and housed. Others have in mind some sort of average for their own district. If the district is a poor one with a low standard of health the Medical Officer in that area is likely to label as "normal" many children who would be classified as "sub-normal" by a fellow Medical Officer in an adjoining area who has a higher conception of normal nutrition.

Lack of Common Standard

The School Medical Officer in Accrington last year found that less than one per cent. of the children in the borough were sub-normal, and none at all were bad. In the Isle of Wight the Medical Officer found 18.4 per cent. sub-normal and 1.6 per cent. bad. Can we really believe that in the Isle of Wight there are proportionately twenty-five times as many under-nourished children as in industrial Accrington, with its unemployed and low-paid cotton workers? Is it not more likely that the doctors responsible for the two sets of figures had quite different conceptions of "normal" in their minds when they set down their figures about nutrition?

It is desirable that the Ministers of Health and Education should try to get their medical advisers to make an effort to arrive at a common measuring rod for assessing the state of nutrition. It would also be common-sense to drop the two separate classes—"Excellent" and "Normal." "Excellent" in this connection has no meaning, except on the assumption that there must be class distinction in health. If excellent nutrition is attained by some children it should be regarded as attainable by all. Why not, therefore, make "Excellent" the standard to be aimed at, and say that those who fall below a really high standard are "Sub-Normal"?

Evidence of Underfeeding

There is evidence that the health of school children in poor districts is generally below the level reached by children in more prosperous districts. Some Medical Officers in industrial areas report that rickets is on the increase. In South Wales the death rate from tuberculosis is 35 per cent. higher than for the country as a whole; the rate there shows an upward tendency, and the victims are mostly young people, who develop the disease within a year or two after leaving school.

The plain meaning of such facts is that there is widespread underfeeding among children of school age, as there must be when incomes over a vast section of our

people cannot possibly purchase even the minimum diet prescribed by experts for the maintenance of health.

The following sentences are taken from a Report on the Depressed Areas prepared by the National Union of Teachers (" Schoolmaster," 18th February, 1937) :—

> " The teachers in the schools . . . have before them children who come from homes which they know, from their own experience, cannot have the necessary income adequately to feed and clothe the children. Many of the teachers are parents themselves and know how much it costs to bring a child up, properly fed and clothed, and they cannot believe, in spite of clinical tests, that the children they teach are adequately fed according to the standards derived from their own parental experience. The teachers feel that undue mental or physical pressure on these children might be productive of serious conseqences. There are no satisfactory clinical tests for the ascertainment of malnutrition until it reaches its secondary stage and organic impairment is observable. It is insidious in its gradual effect and only becomes easy of detection when permanent damage has been done."

It is the duty of the community to feed its children before it tries to educate them. In a rational society it would be considered a crime to attempt to educate an underfed child. But hundreds of teachers must tackle that job to-day.

Free Meals in Nursery Schools

The provision of meals is part of the routine of the Nursery School. We suggest that milk and meals should be supplied free to all children in attendance. Good food, plus the open-air environment, will check epidemics and prevent the development of defects which may do irreparable damage by the time the child is five. This is already proved.

Free Milk in Schools

A daily ration of milk should be available, free, to all school children. The daily ration should be increased from one-third to at least two-thirds of a pint per day. The " Milk-in-Schools " scheme under which cheap milk is available to school children covers roughly half of the school population. This figure includes those children who receive the milk free, because of poverty. We are

assured officially that the other fifty per cent. fail to participate in the scheme because of parental indifference or distaste for milk, not because of poverty.

It is certain that poverty is a much more important cause than the Government is prepared to acknowledge and that a very large number of children prefer to say they don't like milk than to admit that their mothers cannot give them 2½d. every week to pay for it. A head master in Blaina (South Wales) wrote recently in "The Schoolmaster":

> "At the beginning of this term, out of the 125 boys whose fathers were unemployed, an average of forty-six per day (eighteen get clinic milk free) paid their half-pennies for milk. When I offered (with money from sympathisers all over the country) to pay for milk for any boys who would like milk, I had sixty-one extra. The number jumped up to 107. They all welcomed the milk. . . . But some of those boys had previously said, to be loyal to parents whom they knew to be too poor to afford it, that they did not like milk."

School Meals—Discretion of Local Authority

But milk, though it is a most important food for school children, is not enough. Many children are in need of solid meals as well. We must demand a much more extensive use of the School Meals Clauses of the Education Act to ensure that all children in need of meals receive them. The original School Meals Act was designed to ensure that every child should be fed before being subjected to mental and physical instruction. There are still Education Authorities which make no provision for school meals.

The Education Authority has a very wide discretion in this matter. It is not compelled to put the School Meals Clauses into operation: it must decide the basis of selection for free meals, and income scales for this purpose vary tremendously; it is encouraged by recent Circulars from the Board of Education to add a medical test to the income test and to provide meals only if malnutrition as well as poverty is proved. Further, the Milk-in-Schools scheme is clearly regarded by some Authorities as an excuse for not providing free meals. While the number of Authorities providing meals in-

creased from the year 1934-35 to 1935-36, the number of children fed and the number of free meals (apart from free milk) declined.

FREE MEALS (OTHER THAN MILK MEALS)

	No. of Meals	No. of Children
1934-35 ...	25,500,000 ...	156,448
1935-36 ...	23,000,000 ...	143,179

The most recent report on "The Health of the School Child" (published annually by the Board of Education) says:

> "The reduction in the number of children receiving solid meals is probably mostly due to the improved industrial position of the country. **It cannot, however, be viewed altogether with enquanimity as it seems probable that there are in many areas children who would be benefited by an extension of the provision of free meals in addition to the provision of milk."**

How School Meals Clauses should be Used

All Education Authorities should be required to take steps to provide meals under the School Meals Clauses of the Education Act. While a free mid-day meal for every child is not **immediately** practicable, a scheme should be prepared under which dinners will be avilable for any child. The co-operation of parents should be invited to enable all children who live at a distance from school, and any others who wish, to have dinner at school. A charge should be fixed which will cover the cost of the food, and the income limit below which free meals are allowed should be fixed as high as possible—high enough to ensure that children shall have meals free, where the parents' income is insufficient to provide a diet at least on the standard suggested in the pamphlet, "Criticism and Improvement of Diets," published a few years ago by the Ministry of Health. There should be no medical test in connection with school meals.

There should be no distinction between the children who pay for their meals and the children who receive free meals, and Education Authorities should arrange some other method of collecting payments from those who pay, than through the children bringing the money to the teacher.

It should not be difficult to carry out such a scheme in newer secondary and central schools which have more adequate facilities for cooking and serving meals. All new schools, primary and post-primary, should be built with adequate facilities for meals, and Education Authorities should be required to provide the necessary domestic staff.

SCHOOL MEDICAL SERVICE

The School Medical Service has been of incalculable benefit to school children, but until it is backed by a sound nutrition policy, its real constructive function will be subordinate to the remedial aspect.

The service should be extended to ensure that all children shall pass under review more than three times in their school life. With a continuous system of Education from Nursery to Secondary School—from 2 to 16, instead of from 5 to 14—this will be important. More doctors and nurses will be needed to maintain supervision of all school children from the nursery school years up to sixteen. Treatments, as well as advice, should be available for all defects which occur during school life, e.g., special clinics for rheumatism, orthopædic centres, ultra-violet ray treatment, and open-air recovery schools for ailing and convalescent children.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

The Government's policy of promoting health through more intensive physical exercises requires to be carefully watched. Everyone will agree that physical fitness is an important factor in national wellbeing, that it is good that children should know how to keep their limbs supple, and to exercise their muscles properly. But the basis of real physical fitness is good nutrition in childhood, and healthy surroundings. It is too late to seek the perfection of healthy bodies by devising new courses of physical instruction for older children who have been inadequately fed in childhood—and probably still are

inadequately fed—and who had not the space and freedom in which to run about and exercise their limbs and muscles in the years between two and five.

The Government has offered financial assistance to Education Authorities for the provision of gymnastic costumes and shoes so that children may derive greater benefit from physical instruction. Additional financial provision for school meals would have been sounder policy. That there is a case for improving the quality of physical education in many of our schools, no one will deny. But to impose additional physical instruction on children who are not properly fed will do further damage to their health. The underfed child cannot afford to spend energy on physical exercises.

The physical wellbeing which we admire in the youth of other nations—for example, Sweden—is not due mainly to physical training—though that plays its part—but to the better nutrition of the people.

Given a sound nutrition policy, we should encourage physical exercise to maintain fitness, especially by the provision of playing fields for games—outside the cities where possible—and also the organisation of school hostels in the country or by the sea, for holidays and recreation.

CHILD GUIDANCE CLINICS

The "difficult" child presents a problem in almost every school, and the failure to understand him and to deal with him properly, may result in anti-social conduct during or after school years. The emotional disharmony and insecurity which produce the "difficult" child are usually the result of unfortunate home conditions and frequently are attributable to poverty. Every Education Authority should have a Child Guidance Clinic, under the charge of medical and psychological experts, to which difficult or problem children could be referred for advice and treatment. If proper guidance were available to teachers and parents of "difficult" children, it would reduce delinquency and save endless unhappiness and waste in later years.

JUVENILE DELINQUENCY

The treatment of the child who offends against the law is a special problem. The Children's Act of 1907 recognised that the problem of the juvenile offender was different from that of the adult and the Act of 1932 made possible a further advance in dealing with this problem.

Most of the children who come to the Juvenile Courts come because they are the children of poor parents. The well-to-do boy has a school playing field where he plays football; the poor boy has nowhere but the street, and it is an offence to play football in the street. Most children have a healthy and natural craving for sweets and fruit. The well-to-do child has pocket money to buy them; the poor child without a copper to spend, is tempted to steal, and he comes before the Court. If a well-to-do child steals or commits damage, the parents can adjust matters and offer to take the child to a specialist—and no charge is brought against the child.

Measures designed to reduce or eliminate poverty will lead to a decline in juvenile delinquency—and so, too, will a wider use by teachers and parents of the child guidance clinic to help difficult and maladjusted children.

There is need for improvement in our methods of dealing with children who come before the Juvenile Courts. In the court it is the child, not the offence, which matters, but that fundamental principle is still too often ignored.

Younger magistrates are needed in many Juvenile Courts, as it is of the greatest importance to have magistrates who understand children, and have a knowledge of social and economic conditions.

The birching of juvenile offenders should be abolished by law. In the past two years there has been a deplorable increase in birching in some areas, and it is clear from press reports of the speeches of magistrates who have ordered birching, that they are completely unfit to sit in Children's Courts.

It is desirable, too, that the age should be raised from eight to ten at which a child may be charged in the Court with an offence. No child under ten should be sent to

an Approved School, but should be boarded out, and magistrates should be allowed to decide the period for which a child should be sent to a school and not be compelled as at present to commit them for three years, or till fifteen. The Child Guidance Clinics of the Education Authority should be available for the Courts and also Observation Centres where children could reside if necessary during the period of observation.

THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

In the preceding pages we have attempted two things—first to outline a " Children's Charter " which will ensure nurture and education for all from birth to the age of sixteen; second, to indicate an order of priority, by distinguishing between measures terribly urgent and likely to yield the greatest social returns in a short period, and those which might be postponed until the more urgent have been carried out.

Economic conditions strengthen the arguments for certain of our proposals, but a substantial improvement in the standard of life would not weaken them. The strain and pace of factory life and the prevalence of unemployment add to the urgency of our demand that all children should be kept out of the factory and out of the labour market till sixteen; the record of physical defects in childhood makes a wider provision of child welfare services and nursery schools an imperative necessity; the prevalence of underfeeding requires extensive provision of free milk and school meals.

With factory conditions improved and hours of work shortened, the fundamental argument for extended education for all children, would still stand; with slums wiped out and wage standards raised, the case for nursery schools and for collective provision of school meals would remain.

For our Children's Charter, which will give children the right conditions of nurture from birth, and the opportunity of an education shared with others from two to

sixteen, is based on the Socialist demand that every boy and girl in the land should, as a natural right, have access to the conditions of healthy growth and to the best education we can give. Our duty as citizens is to provide for the child the fullest opportunity to live and grow in his own world—which is not the world of adults—to develop his faculties, to excite his curiosity, and to prompt the disposition to enquiry on which the wise exercise of the rights of citizenship in later years depends.

Mothers who belong to the Labour, Co-operative and Trade Union movements, have power through their organisations to win the majority of mothers in the country to the high conception of motherhood and citizenship involved in that demand: the belief that it is the primary duty of a mother to share in the job of making the world a fit place for her child.

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